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**THE  
GROWTH OF RELIGIOUS IDEALS**

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LONDON: GAY AND BIRD

THE  
GROWTH OF RELIGIOUS  
IDEALS

AS ILLUSTRATED BY  
THE GREAT ENGLISH POETS

BY THE  
REV. H. G. ROSEDALE  
M.A., D.D. (CH.CH. OXON), F.R.S.L.  
VICAR OF ST. PETER'S, BAYSWATER, LONDON, W.

GAY AND BIRD  
22 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND  
LONDON

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## P R E F A C E

IN offering this book to seekers after truth on both sides of the Atlantic, I claim no originality of interpretation with respect to the message of any one of all the authors who come under our consideration. I do not even flatter myself that the idea itself is quite novel, or that others have not expressed the teachings of our several poets in a far abler way than I have done. All I claim is that in the volume before my readers there is matter interesting to the earnest evolutionist, and many indications of a growth and developing continuity in the thoughts underlying the works of the greatest poets of England in



succeeding centuries—a fact which cannot fail to interest the intellect and to fill the hearts of true men with a sense of security and confidence.

It has been my practice for some years to deliver a series of lectures to my congregation on some unconventional and educational subject during the season of Lent. In the year 1898 I prepared and delivered a series of lectures on 'Teachings from the Poets.' Before this course was completed I realized that there was an undoubted relation of thought between the various authors, and that this relationship lay in the direction of 'a mainly upward movement.' After pursuing this study for some time I came to the conviction that those poets whom I had selected for special study, under the belief that they were the flower of English poesy, showed in certain directions a continuous and remarkable progress and systematic expansion.

Under this impression I prepared a paper on the subject to be read before the Royal Society of Literature. The paper was so kindly received that I have ventured to take the advice of some of my friends, and to produce the paper in an enlarged form and with many additions, in order that the sense of Divine guidance which the subject both postulates and demonstrates might be of help to a wider circle, and might lead some thinkers to see the hand of God writing his Revelations in the literature of this land. I desire to help by this small work to bring nearer the time when none shall fail to recognise the guiding care of a loving Father in all the affairs of human life.

In offering this book, purporting to direct men's minds to a Divine Revelation through our national literature, to the world of English readers, I do so with the profound conviction that I am adding to, rather than detracting

from, the force and glory of other Revelations.

In considering a subject of so unlimited a range it is not possible to do more than touch the fringe of many of the matters which come before us. I have not attempted to do more, believing that by suggesting the ideas others will be led to a deeper and more thorough study of one or two of the themes herein alluded to.

To myself, the subjects seem capable of infinite enlargement, and to be, what is even better, treasure-rooms of noble and holy inspiration.

H. G. ROSEDALE.

ST. PETER'S VICARAGE,  
BAYSWATER, W.

*June, 1902.*

## PROGRESSIVE CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

### THE GREAT 'FIRST CAUSE.'

#### Chaucer.

'The First Movere of the Cause Above.'

*Knight's Tale*, line 2,987.

'What maketh this but Juppiter the King,  
The which is Prince and Cause of Alle Thyng.'

*Knight's Tale*, line 3,035.

### THE JUST KING.

#### Shakespeare.

'Great God! how just art Thou!'

2 *Henry VI.*, v., 1.

'That dread King that took our state upon Him.'

2 *Henry VI.*, iii., 2.

### THE MERCIFUL JUDGE.

#### Milton.

'Easy it may be seen that I intend

Mercy colleague with justice.'

*Paradise Lost*, x., 58.

THE 'ALL-GOOD.'

Burns.

'Do Thou, All Good! for such Thou art,  
But Thou are good; and Goodness still  
Delighteth to forgive.'  
*A Prayer in Prospect of Death.*

THE GREAT 'OVER-SOUL' EVIDENCED IN  
ALL NATURE.

Wordsworth.

'A motion and a spirit, that impels,  
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,  
And rolls through all things.'  
*Lines on Revisiting the Wye*  
*in 1798.*

THE GOOD FATHER.

Tennyson.

'As a child that cries,  
But, crying, knows his father near.'  
*In Memoriam, cxxiv.*

'A voice as unto Him that hears  
That God, which ever lives and loves.'  
*In Memoriam, cxxxi.*

### PERFECT LOVE.

Browning.

‘The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?  
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too.’  
*An Epistle from Karshish.*

## PROGRESSIVE IDEALS OF WORSHIP

### HONEST PURPOSE.

Chaucer.

‘But Cristes loore, and his Apostles twelve  
He taughte, but first he folwed it hym selve.’  
*Prologue, line 528.*

### DUTY AND HONOUR.

Shakespeare.

‘. . . . In thy face I see  
The map of honour, truth, and loyalty.’  
*2nd pt. Henry VI., iii., 1.*

### SELF ABASEMENT.

Milton.

‘What better can we do, than, . . . .  
. . . . . prostrate fall  
Before Him reverent, and there confess  
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears  
Watering the ground.’  
*Paradise Lost, x., 1,086.*

## KINDLINESS.

Burns.

'The social, friendly, honest man,  
Whate'er he be,  
'Tis he fulfils great Nature's plan,  
An' none but he !'  
*2nd Epistle to Lapraik.*

## DEVOTION.

Wordsworth.

'And in the Light of Truth thy bondman let me  
live.'  
*Ode to Duty.*

## REVERENCE.

Tennyson.

'Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of Reverence in us dwell ;  
That mind and soul, according well,  
May make one music as before,—but vaster.'  
*In Memoriam.*

## LOVE, CONFIDENCE, AND COURAGE.

Browning.

'Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,  
"Strive and thrive !" Cry, "Speed—fight on !"''  
*Epilogue to Asolando.*

**Chaucer.**

*Knight's Tale*, line 8,037.

**Shakespeare.**

*Tempest*, iv., 1.

**Milton.**

*Paradise Lost*, x., 781.

**Burns.**

*Cotter's Saturday Night*, xvi.



XIV IDEALS OF A PERSONAL FUTURE LIFE

'REMINISCENCES' POINT TO HIGHER  
SPIRITUAL LIFE.

Wordsworth.

'The soul that rises with us, our Life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting.'

*Ode on Intimations, v.*

'Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither,  
Can in a moment travel thither.'

*Ode on Intimations, ix.*

A LARGER HOPE.

Tennyson.

'Oh! yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,

. . . . .  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last—far off—at last, to all.'

*In Memoriam, liv.*

CERTAINTY OF FUTURE SPIRITUAL  
EXISTENCE FOR ALL.

Browning.

. . . . . I press God's lamp  
Close to my breast.—Its splendour, soon or late  
Will pierce the gloom.'

*Paracelsus.*

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# THE GROWTH OF RELIGIOUS IDEALS

## CHAPTER I

### OUR SUBJECT

**The Ultimate  
Victory of  
Good.** AROUND the great Mosque at  
Damascus there cluster many  
historical memories. This

Mosque was built upon the site of an ancient heathen temple, and destroyed in the middle of the fourth century by the Roman Emperor Theodosius the Great. His son Arcadius rebuilt it, and for 300 years it served as a Christian cathedral, until at last it fell into the hands of the Moslems, who, for more than a thousand years, have held it and used it as a Mohammedan mosque. Many of its ancient glories have vanished, but there

is one relic of the past which no follower of the Prophet has been allowed to deface. Over the vestibule, graven in Greek letters on the enduring stone, stands this inscription : ' Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.' This Christian record of confidence in the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of God, still standing, after more than ten centuries of Moslem occupation, ought to be an inspiration to us, who are looking out on to the years of the twentieth century, with the hope that is father to the thought, that in its bosom may lie a much more distinct and definite approach to that condition of earthly peace and joy which we call the ' kingdom of Heaven.'

The foregoing is a declaration of optimism, and since

**Our Justification.** optimism has always been equivalent to intellectual and spiritual virility, we need not fear to range ourselves side by side with the greatest and noblest thinkers of every land.

**In Spite  
of Present  
Evils.**

No honest student, however, dare blind himself to the fact that things, as we see them in daily life, are far from perfect, nor will he fail to recognise that even the Christian Church in its highest and most ideal phases falls very far short of that standard and character set forth in the life and teachings of its Founder.

Realizing this, however, he need not be disheartened, but rather, recognising that 'time means amelioration,' he will be stimulated to do his share in bringing nearer 'that far-off Divine event towards which the whole creation moves.'

We cannot, indeed, avoid from time to time a feeling of despondency when we recognise how slow the progress is; but if we have indeed assimilated the best spirit of the day in which we live, if we have learnt that in spite of much that perplexes us owing to the tiny field of vision attained by our minute and microscopic minds, all things are really working together for human good, we shall take

heart from the visions of the great seers of our day, and shall begin to understand the value of such prophetic expressions as the following—one of the last public utterances of that great Christian statesman William Ewart Gladstone:—

‘Let us believe and know that Christianity is advancing all the time, and, though men’s hearts may fail them through fear, the Church goes on in God-guided and irresistible movements.’

To this happy conclusion,  
**A Great Optimist.** he had come by the intelligent study of history. His was the Divine vision that saw the golden age not in the yesterday of outward pomp, but in the reality and depth of the inner life of the future. As Whittier has well said,

‘All the good the past has had  
 Remains to make our own world glad.’

But the good in the world, as well as the progress of the race, lies not in things material, but in its ideals. It is in ideals ever growing

and ever expanding that the world's greatest assets consist, and by ideals men are stimulated to loftier aspirations and towards nobler goals.

**Progress is  
in Ideals.** Ideals have always been in the world, but they have become larger as the mind of man has expanded, and they have found their best expression in the lives of the great leaders of the world, in its intellectual and moral giants.

The various stages of the expansion of human ideals have been marked and recorded by the most honoured literature of each race and epoch, but especially by the writings of those who have proved their right to be numbered among the great poets of the world by the vitality of their works and the power they have exhibited to dominate the minds of their own day.

**This Pro-  
gress is  
marked in  
Poetic  
Literature.** The late Poet Laureate has given emphasis to this fact of a regular and systematic series of stages in the march, upward and forward, when he says :



‘Of many changes aptly joined  
 Is bodied forth the second whole ;  
 Regard gradation; lest the soul  
 Of discord raise the rising wind—  
 A wind to puff your idol-fires,  
 And heap the ashes on the head.’

These gradations are not always easy to differentiate in the literatures of the Continent, but may be clearly seen in the writings of the great English poets. It will be our work, then, to trace out as far as possible the growing ideals which this branch of English literature displays ; and, as the range of ideals extends into every department of thought and practice, it will be well that we should, at the very outset, limit ourselves to those ideals of the poets which deal with deepest aspects of human life, such as—

- I. The conception of God.
- II. The ideal of worship.
- III. Ideas on a personal future life.

One other definition it may be well to

**Our Special  
Considerations.**

make. What do we mean by the term 'a great poet,' and which of the heroes of English verse are to be included in this category? The answer must depend upon the degree of utility which we assign to the poet, and what we conceive to be his place in the human economy. We will attempt to answer these questions.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ENGLISH POETS

**The Work  
of a Poet.**

A poet has many parts, but not least among these is the work of transmitting moral and religious conceptions through the envelope of musical intonations, from the few great minds of a generation, to the mass of only half-interested individuals, or even to the crowd. Every true poet is so by virtue of his sensitive nature, ever feeling the impulse of thought-waves coming to him in every direction, and ever weaving those thoughts into that brilliant web of musical cadences which lays hold of the interest and affection of men by touching the responsive note in their own constitutions.

But whilst the poet is to a great extent a sensitive machine, he can only transmit

thought on his own level; thus it comes about that the distinction between a poet and a great poet is that the latter possesses, amongst other things, side by side with the characteristics we have mentioned, a great intellect. Such a poet, must be intellectually

**The Great Poet.** on a level with the best men of his period, and so able to transmit the best and highest

thoughts of his day in a form intelligible to less highly-developed minds, as well as to draw aside the curtain sufficiently to enable the wise to take a further glance into truth. Such poets, however, are extremely rare. In English literature they may be said to hardly exceed some dozen names; but for our present purposes I propose only to consider a few prominent authors, the leaders of representative groups, since any other course would involve the consideration of such details as

could not fail to hopelessly en-

**A Selection.** tangle our subject. Roughly speaking, such writers as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Burns, Words-

worth, Tennyson, and Browning, cover the subject of the special trend of that aspect of poetic force which we are considering.

Coleridge, Dryden, and Pope perhaps, might be included, but the first two are covered by Milton, the last is more of a destructive critic than a constructive teacher; and whilst Shelley, Keats, and Byron have each their strong feature, all the best of these characteristics are to be found in Tennyson and Browning.

Need we offer any excuse for claiming the latter as one of the few great poets of English literature? In a less cultured period, perhaps, this might have been necessary, but in the twentieth century, when words are more than mere sounds, the mass of thoughtful readers will be at one in saying that, though Browning's style is rugged and sometimes obscure, his insight and intellect are such as to carry away those who read him to an age in advance of the present; and he succeeds, moreover, in bringing his readers into direct touch with the harmonies of existence.

The literary history of England, whilst it is vigorous and distinctive, does not extend over a very lengthy period; but short as that period is, English literature has known at least three distinct revivals, after periods of apparent decadence. Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare each stand for a renaissance in the literary history of England. It is at least a curious fact that those periods of revival coincide with three periods in which the interest in Bible study was peculiarly marked.

The promulgation of versions of the Scriptures just before the Chaucerian writings, and the two great eras of Biblical translation anticipating the achievements of Spenser and Shakespeare, indicate a close connection between intellectual activity and spiritual progress, whilst the periods of moral and religious torpor are strangely devoid of any really powerful authors. We must note how strangely bare the period between Chaucer and Spenser is of that strong, vital poetry

which is ever the companion of a nation's intellectual activity; and, indeed, that period corresponds exactly with the time of moral and religious decadence which existed between what are known as the first and second 'Primers.' The end of Chaucer's life was simultaneous with the compilation of the first English Prayer-Book, called the 'First Primer,' whilst the resumption of poetic continuity, as found in the writings of Spenser, follows almost immediately on the publication of the 'Second Primer,' as well as the first and second Prayer-Books of Edward VI., both of these results being due to a return into the line of direct progress, from which the previous century and a half had been so curious and unfortunate a divergence.

It is impossible in dealing with such a subject, to avoid trenching to some extent on the domain of ecclesiastical history, as the range of usefulness which belongs to the

greatest teachers, whether in Church or literature, must be one and the same.

Nor can we ignore such events as the Reformation, since that series of movements has built itself more firmly into the tower of poesy than any other circumstance in English history.

In the light of the greater scholarship of our times, leading scholars—such, for instance, as the late Dr. Creighton—have begun to

From the Re-  
formation. recognise that if at the Reformation men went to unwarrantable excesses, on the whole it was an honest as well as successful attempt to come back to the line of steady progress, and to throw off the narrowing chains that the degraded state of Continental religion had been forging around the freedom-loving hearts of Englishmen.

Religious life on the Continent was suffering from arrested development, with all its necessary accompaniments of mortifying diseases. The contagion had spread to England, and for over one hundred years held her back



from progress and degraded her Court and morals. With the publication of Tyndale's New Testament, quickly followed by Coverdale's and **Translation of the Bible.** Matthews' Bibles, and finally by the 'Great Bible,' the new spirit arose in Scotland, and quickly spread to this land—a spirit which made it impossible for Britons to remain any longer the mere creatures of the past.

Yet this was not really a new spirit; it was but the resumption of that thoughtful, reverent, and critical spirit which had been lying dormant, but which has ever been part of our national heritage—the spirit that recognises the Divine Spirit energizing in all the events of the universe.

The effects of such a spirit are ever well marked, and the great poet not only crystallizes them, but proclaims the spirit itself to those who are to be influenced by it.

## CHAPTER III

### CHAUCER AND HIS MESSAGE

BEFORE the time of Chaucer and his contemporary, Langland, there was not a single authentically great English writer either in poetry or prose.

There are those who would rank Caedmon—the product of the religious stimulus which resulted from the mission of Augustine to this country—amongst the number of the great poetic ‘seers’ of England; but whilst he undoubtedly did much to found a literature for his own day, it would be difficult to show that he did much else.

**The First  
Great  
English  
Poet.**

Chaucer, on the other hand, has given us not only language but thought; he has crystallized English character into a mould, to whose shape it still adheres. In the words of an able writer in the Chaucer

Memorial Lectures, we may say 'he exhibits beyond any other writer in number and extent those qualities and characteristics which we regard as peculiarly and essentially English. I refer to his abundant good sense; his freedom from morbid mysticism and superstition; his hatred of cant; his penetrating observation; his vivid and accurate delineation of detail and graphic portraiture; his rich imagination and irrepressible, genial, and frolicsome humour.'

Matthew Arnold has said of Chaucer, 'With him is born our real English poetry.'

That Chaucer taught his  
**His**  
**Teachings.** readers a sincere and devout  
as well as a practical Christian  
spirit is evident even on the surface of his  
writings.

God to him, however, was,  
**God.** as we shall presently see, only  
a far-off abstraction—

'The First Movere of the Cause above,'  
or— 'Jupiter the King,  
The which is Princee and Cause of Alle  
Thyng';

but he clearly acknowledges Christ, and participates in all that goes to make up His worship, at the same time not only did he claim it as his right, but even as his duty to protest against the unworthy practices which had even then begun to be visible within the pale of the Church herself.

**The  
Religious  
Ideals of  
the Day.**

We cannot fail to notice the quiet satire of which he makes use in reference to some of the religious formalities of his day, in his account of the Archdeacon and the Sompnour in the 'Frier's Tale.' Of the former he says :

' And small tithers weren foule yshent  
If any person wold upon him plaine,  
Ther might astert him no pecunial peine ;  
For small tithes and small offering  
He made the people to piteously sing,  
For ere the Bishop caught hem with his hook  
They weren in the Archdeacon's book ;  
And then had he through his jurisdiction  
Power to don on hem correction.'

If our view that a great poet *does* express the average thought of the best minds of his day be correct, then in this and many other

instances there is much to  
**Yet Pro-** show that the practical im-  
**foundly**  
**Philosophic.** morality of the Continental  
 religious system was already

beginning to arouse the animosity of thoughtful men in this country. There is, too, ample evidence that below the surface the better minds even at that early date were possessed of no mean religious ideal; that the basic thoughts of all noble ideas were present, and, indeed, not least among those ideas a high conception of the nature of the Divinity, for a passage in the 'Knight's Tale' (line 2,989, etc.) reads very like a bit of twentieth-century religious thought. We venture to quote a rendering taken from one of Mr. Lang's books:

'The inscrutable First Cause  
**Creation** of the universe knew well what  
**and**  
**Causation.** He was about when He established the fair chain of love or  
 of mutual attraction.

' For with this chain He bound the elements

— fire, air, water, and land — together in definite forms, so as not to fly asunder into primeval chaos.

‘In like manner He established certain periods and durations for all creation, beyond which nothing could pass ; this needs no authority to confirm it, for it is proved by universal experience.

‘Men, therefore, by this order of the universe, may easily discern that the laws of nature are fixed and eternal.

‘And anyone who is not a fool can understand that, as every part is derived from a whole, nature cannot have originated from any part or parcel of a thing, but from something that is perfect and stable, passing by evolution from the homogeneous into the heterogeneous, until it becomes subject to change and corruption.

‘The Creator of the universe has therefore, in His wise providence, so established its order that definite pieces and progressions of things shall not be eternal, but come into existence and pass away in due succession.

‘ Thus, the oak, which grows so slowly and has so long a life, at last wastes away and dies.

‘ Even the hard rock in time wasteth away ; broad rivers dry ; great cities decay and disappear ; and all things have an end.

‘ So also of the human race, all die ; some in youth, others in old age ; kings as well as commoners ; some in their beds, some in the deep sea, some in battlefields.

‘ There is no help ; all go the same way— all die.

‘ What causeth this but the Ruler and First Cause of all things, who draws back into His own essence all that was derived from it, against which decree it availeth no living creature to strive ?

‘ Therefore, it seems to me to be wise to make a virtue of necessity, and make the best of that which we cannot prevent ; and that a man is a fool who grumbles at that which is the universal fate, and rebels against the law to which he is indebted for his own existence.’

From the writings of Chaucer  
**Beginnings of a  
Revolt from  
Ecclesiasticism.** it would not be very difficult to  
gather that during the second  
half of the fourteenth century,  
whilst what may be called the  
Christianity of the day was undoubtedly  
much tainted with Italian ecclesiasticism, and  
thereby degraded to a mere cult, religion (we  
use the word in its best sense), resulting from  
a high ideal of God, was at least robust, and,  
as far as the notion of the stronger and what  
might be called the most noble attributes of  
God, are concerned, it is open to doubt whether  
any nineteenth-century theologian has a higher  
conception than that which is given by Chaucer  
in the passage quoted. But any growth in the  
general character of the masses, which would  
otherwise have benefited largely from such an  
ideal, seems to have been smothered by the  
immense volume of false ideals that super-  
vened until, as it has been pointed out, in the  
middle of the sixteenth century, mainly in con-  
sequence of the grand and elevating literature  
which was given to the people of England in



the publication of the various English Bibles, a better spirit, the spirit of religious liberty and progress, the spirit of intellectual religious conception, which had ceased for so long, was once more resumed.

**Religious  
Acknow-  
ledgment.**

But to return to the poet himself. Whilst protesting against certain evils which he sees associated with religion, he nevertheless registers the fact that his faith in Christ was of a robust sort, although overshadowed by superstitions from which even he could not escape. His 'Hymn to the Virgin' in the Prologue to the 'Prioress's Tale' indicates a deep and beautiful reverence.

‘ O mother maid ! O maiden mother free !  
O bush unburnt, burning in Moses’ sight !  
That didst draw down from the Deity,  
Through thine humblesse, the soul that in th’  
          alighte,  
Of whose virtue, when he thine herte lighte  
Conceivéd, was the father’s sapience,  
Help me to tell it in thy reverence !

'Lady, thy bounty, thy magnificence,  
 Thy virtue and thy great humility,  
 There may no tongue express in no science ;  
 For sometime, lady, ere men pray to thee,  
 Thou goest before of thy benignity,  
 And gettest us the light through thy preyere  
 To guide us unto thy son so dear.'

Outward reverence, however,  
**His** will not satisfy Chaucer's prac-  
**Practical** tical mind ; he recognises that  
**Teachings.**

God requires something more  
 of us than protestations. All true worship  
 must find its expression in every-day life, and  
 so he teaches the value of genuine, unaffected  
 piety in his description of the parson in his  
 famous ' Prologue.'

' A good man was ther of religioun,  
 And was a POURE PERSON OF A TOUN ;  
 But riche he was of hooly thought and werk ;  
 He was also a lernéd man, a clerk,  
 That Cristés Gospel trewely wolde preche :  
 His parissshens devoutly wolde he teche.  
 Benygne he was, and wonder diligent,  
 And in adversitee ful pacient ;

And swich he was y-prevéd ofté sithes.  
 Ful looth were hym to cursen for his tithes,  
 But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,  
 Unto his pouré parisshe aboute,  
 Of his offryng and eek of his substaunce :  
 He koude in lital thyng have suffisaunce.  
 Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer asonder,  
 But he ne lafté nat for reyn ne thonder,  
 In siknesse nor in meschief to visite  
 The ferreste in his parisshe, muche and lite,  
 Upon his feet, and in his hand a staf.  
 This noble ensample to his sheepe he yaf  
 That firste he wroghte and afterward he  
 taughte.

Out of the Gospel he tho wordés caughte,  
 And this figure he added eek therto,  
 That if gold rusté what shal iren doo ?  
 For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,  
 No wonder is a lewéd man to ruste ;  
 And shame it is, if a prest také keepe,  
 A shiten shepherde and a clené sheepe.  
 Wel oghte a preest ensample for to yive  
 By his clenness how that his sheepe sholde  
 lyve.

He setté nat his benefice to hyre  
And leet his sheepe encombred in the myre,  
And ran to Londoun, unto Seïnt Poules,  
To seken hym a chaunterie for soules ;  
Or with a bretherhed to been withholde,  
But dwelte at hoom and kepté wel his folde,  
So that the wolf ne made it nat myscarie,—  
He was a shepherde, and noght a mercenarie :  
And though he hooly were and vertuous,  
He was to synful man nat despitous,  
Ne of his speché daungerous ne digne,  
But in his techyng déscreet and benygne,  
To drawen folk to hevene by fairnesse,  
By good ensample, this was his bisynesse :  
But it were any persone obstinat,  
What so he were, of heigh or lough estat,  
Hym wolde he snybben sharply for the  
nony.

A bettré preest I trowe that nowher noon ys ;  
He waited after no pompe and reverence,  
Ne maked him a spicéd conscience,  
But Cristés loore, and his Apostles twelve,  
He taughte, but first he folwed it hym  
selve.'

**A Future  
Life.**

Beyond the broad lines of general conduct it seems difficult to define what may be called Chaucer's 'views,' and this is especially true with regard to any expression of opinion on the future life. In the 'Knight's Tale,' however, and in the passage of which I have quoted Mr. Lang's rendering, he says:

'Convertynge al unto his propre wellle  
From which it is dirryved.'

From this and other passages we may surmise that God was to him the great 'Fashioner,' and that out of some great central mass He kept forming and re-forming all things, and that in due time 'death causes all these different creations to return to their common source.'

In so early and semi-civilized an age as that in which Chaucer lived, any deeper or more concise thought would have been impossible, and we may well believe that the number of those whose best thought Chaucer thus crystallizes and records must have been comparatively few in number.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHAKESPEARE AND HIS MESSAGE

**THERE** is nothing that so demonstrates the relationship of the best minds of our own land in the sixteenth century towards the religious condition of their time than the moral and religious views expressed in Shakespeare, in which we may recognise the sequel to the religious thought of the Chaucer period. Who will fail to see the picture which presents itself—viz., that of a larger and grander conception of God, tending to practical godliness, presenting itself in that collection of writings known as ‘Shakespeare’s Works?’

But whilst this is the case,  
**His Caution.** there is (as a result of a reformation amongst the clergy, as well as in religious thought generally) a change of attitude observable in the later author. There is evidenced in ‘Shakespeare’

that shrewd care necessary amid the divided camps of the High and Low Churchman of his day not to prejudice a case that in his time was still to a great extent *sub judice*; but it is interesting to gather from these writings that the antagonism of the thinkers of his day was quite as much directed against excessive puritanism as it was against the 'ecclesiasticism' of the Reformation period. Shakespeare was evidently an excellent specimen of his century's best thought.

Even if not Christian by open profession, as we should now say, he evidences decided religious convictions; and whilst daring to look at truth in his own way—that is, in reference to practical utility—he maintains an honourable attitude towards the Church, and aims in his writings at raising the moral standard of the time. He never posed as a reformer, announced no creed, championed no special cause, and yet, as Guizot writes, 'was the most profound and dramatic of moralists.' No doubt Coleridge, too, is right when, in reference to Shakespeare's treat-

ment of the priestly character as contrasted with that of Beaumont and Fletcher's, he says of his clerical characters: 'They always carry with them our love and respect.'

Whenever a holy subject is  
**Yet always** touched by this writer, it is  
**Reverent.**

with a deep sentiment of unaffected reverence, and we cannot, I think, help agreeing with De Vere when he says of this author: 'That he was a devout Christian no one who appreciates his poetry can doubt, though it is certain his religious tone has no sympathy with sect or conventicle.'

For instance, Friar Laurence in 'Romeo and Juliet,' throughout the play, moralizes as a shrewd human teacher rather than as an ascetic divine, and is the farthest removed from the professional cant. Shakespeare, in 'Measure for Measure,' makes Lucio say to Isabella of the convent:

'I hold you a thing enskied and sainted;  
By your renouncement an immortal spirit,  
And to be talked with in sincerity  
As with a saint.'



But even to those who are not versed in theological subtleties, the words of Isabella to Angelo, when pleading for her brother's life, point out that, far as Shakespeare had gone in the fuller and larger idea of God's relationship to man, he had not come to realize any sense of the inherent oneness of God with man; to Shakespeare God is only the Judge.

And we may ask, What is

**Worship.** Shakespeare's idea of the responsibilities that devolve upon man in regard to his God? What does God expect of man? If we may judge by his writings alone, Shakespeare would seem to represent the thoughtful man of years and experience, who has at last come to realize that true religion is to do one's duty, and at the same time entertain a sense of the fear of God. To resist the lower impulses, and thus to cultivate 'grace.' In 'Romeo and Juliet' the Friar is made to preach a little homily on life:

'Two such opposed kings encamp them still  
In man as well as herbs—grace and rude will;

And when the worser is predominant,  
Full soon the canker doth eat up that plant.'

Further light on the question of Shakespeare's view of the practical duties of life may be gathered from his magnificent description of the humbled Cardinal Wolsey. The dethroned statesman, when he finds how precarious are the gains of human ingenuity, confides his whole future to the care of God, and thus turns the tempest in his heart into a 'peace which passeth all understanding.' He feels his heart 'new opened' and 'rising on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things'; he replies to the question of the sympathetic Cromwell, 'How does your Grace?'

'Why, well ;

Never so truly happy, my good Cromwell.  
I know myself now, and feel within me  
A peace above all earthly dignities,  
A still and quiet conscience.'

He then proceeds to teach how, in his estimation, a man should live and act :

'Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition :  
 By that sin fell the angels ; how can man, then,  
 The image of his Maker, hope to win by it ?  
 Love thyself last : cherish those hearts that  
     hate thee ;  
 Corruption wins not more than honesty.  
 Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,  
 To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear  
     not :  
 Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,  
 Thy God's, and truth's ; then if thou fall'st,  
     O Cromwell,  
 Thou fall'st a blessed martyr.'

In reference to the Shake-  
**Future Life.** spearian view of the future  
 life, it is true that when  
 Angelo says to Isabella,

'Your brother is a forfeit of the law,  
 And you but waste your words,'

her answer is :

'Alas ! alas !

Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once ;  
 And He that might the vantage best have took  
 Found out the remedy.'

But this is inconclusive.  
**Unsatis-** We fail entirely to see how it  
**factory.** was that Carlyle could find any  
'comfort of immortal hope' in Shakespearian  
song. There is, indeed, one sonnet—'Soul  
and Body'—from which something may be  
gathered :

'Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,  
Foiled by these rebel powers that thee array,  
Why dost thou pine within and suffer death,  
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay ?  
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,  
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend ?  
Shall worms—inheritors of this excess—  
Eat up thy charge ? Is this thy body's end ?  
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,  
And let that pine to aggravate thy store ;  
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross ;  
Within be fed, without be rich no more.  
So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on  
men ;  
And death once dead, there's no more dying  
then.'

But is this authentic ? It is certain that the critics will not allow us to cling to it ; and even if they were so kind, this passage would be strangely solitary. Against it we may set words which are undoubted—viz., those which Prospero uses in his farewell address to the World ; they point, as we should expect them to do in that early period, to a wise vagueness—an admixture of Pantheism with the Hindoo doctrine of ‘ Maya ’ :

‘ And like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous  
palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.’

## CHAPTER V

### MILTON AND HIS MESSAGE

IN order to follow the development of thought which ensued during the first half of the seventeenth century, we must try to realize what had been going on in the various countries of Europe. Under the common title of Protestantism almost every phase of religious thought, from the dignified Churchmanship of England to the narrow Calvinism of Geneva, was the object of bitter and often inhuman attacks. The effort was plainly an attempt on the part of the so-called orthodox bodies to suppress all unprejudiced thought in matters religious.

The spirit of this country  
**The Condition** was naturally in direct an-  
**of England in** tagonism to any form of  
**his Day.** persecution, and fugitives  
from the Continent, who found in this country

a congenial refuge, had, no doubt, a leavening influence on the English Church, already undergoing a change owing to the insistence of Scotch theological controversialists. The direction of this change was from the broader individualism of the Shakespearian writings to the narrower individualism evidenced in Milton, and producing in its turn that puritanical religious atmosphere which, while it was essential to the persistence of 'The Faith,' as we hold it, was nevertheless an apparently retrograde movement, an intense literalism, and an almost heathen anthropomorphism.

The infallible man was no longer accepted. An infallible Church no longer claimed the devotion of men; but the longing for an infallible something has ever been present in human hearts, and, after this period of change, the longing gradually developed into the veneration of an infallible Book, until the very language of the day was permeated with Bible phraseology. Milton

derived much of his inspiration from the Bible, and whilst theology undoubtedly acted upon him, he none the less acted powerfully upon the religious thought of the generations that followed.

The average conception  
**Milton's Great** entertained up to the middle  
**Influence.** of this century by the  
 English people of Adam, Eve, Paradise,  
 Heaven, Hell, and God, are chiefly derived  
 from his 'Paradise Lost,' whilst the grotesque  
 person of Satan, the Panlike  
**Anthropo-** devil of popular mythology,  
**morphic** is purely Miltonic. There is  
**Views.** something almost ludicrous in  
 the conception of the Arch Fiend struggling  
 amongst the undergrowth to find his way to  
 the Garden of Eden :

' Now, to th' ascent of that steep, savage hill,  
 Satan had journeyed on, pensive and slow ;  
 But further way found none, so thick en-  
     twined,  
 As one continued brake, the undergrowth  
 Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplex'd



All path of man or beast that past that way.  
 One gate there only was, and that looked  
     east  
 On th' other side; which, when th' arch-  
     felon saw,  
 Due entrance he disdain'd, and in con-  
     tempt  
 At one slight bound high overleap'd all  
     bound.'

Nor can we, in the brighter  
 God.      ideals that are ours, quite  
             understand Milton's concep-  
 tion of God, unless, indeed, in the light of  
 Milton's hereditary bias, or the limited char-  
 acter of the educational arena of his day,  
 tainted with the spirit of Calvinism.

We are apt to wonder, Can Milton have  
 meant what he said when he spoke thus of  
 God?

'To appease betimes th' incensed Deity.'

Or—

'Him who disobeys  
*Me* disobeys, breaks union, and that day

Cast out from God and blessed union, falls  
Into utter darkness deep engulfed, his place  
Ordain'd, without redemption, without  
end.'

The following description of the Son of  
God driving the hosts of heaven before Him  
is painfully realistic :

'Drove them before Him thunder-struck,  
pursued  
With terrors and with furies to the bounds  
And crystal wall of heav'n, which, op'ning  
wide,  
Rolled inward, and a spacious gap disclosed  
Into the wasteful deep ; the monstrous sight  
Struck them with horror backward ; but far  
worse  
Urged them behind ; headlong themselves  
they threw  
Down from the verge of heav'n, eternal  
wrath  
Burned after them to the bottomless pit.  
Hell heard th' unsufferable noise, hell saw

Heaven ruining from heaven, and would  
have fled

Affrighted; but strict Fate had cast too  
deep

Her dark foundations, and too fast had  
bound.

Nine days they fell; confounded Chaos  
roared,

And felt tenfold confusion in their fall

Through his wild anarchy; so huge a rout

Incumbered him with ruin: hell at last

Yawning received them whole, and on them  
closed;

Hell their fit habitation, fraught with fire

Unquenchable, the house of woe and pain.

Disburdened heav'n rejoiced, and soon re-  
paired

Her mural breach, returning whence it  
roll'd.

"Sole Victor, from th' expulsion of His foes  
Messiah His triumphal chariot turned:

To meet Him all His saints, who silent stood

Eye-witnesses of His almighty acts,

With Jubilee advanced." "

We now come to consider  
**Worship.** Milton's attitude towards religious life. At the very outset it is clear that if Chaucer and Shakespeare had no sympathy for conventional formalism, in the case of Milton that tendency was intensified. The poet tells us that he was intended for the Ministry, but that he experienced a feeling of horror for the degradation into which that office had fallen. In 'Lycidas' he expresses contempt for the clergy of his day very plainly :

' Last came, and last did go,  
The pilot of the Galilean lake.  
Two massy keys he bore of metals twain,  
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain).  
He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake.  
"How well could I have spared for thee,  
young swain,  
Enow of such as for their bellies' sake  
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold !  
Of other care they little reckoning make,

Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,  
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest ;  
 Blind mouths ! that scarce themselves know  
     how to hold  
 A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else  
     the least  
 That to the faithful herdman's art belongs !  
 What recks it them ? What need they ?  
     They are sped. " '

For the Roman Church he has, as might  
 have been expected, no sympathy, and pours  
 out upon it the most caustic criticism. Of  
 that Church he says :

' With gay religions full of pomp and gold,  
 And Devils to adore for Deities :  
 Then were they known to men by various  
     names,  
 And various idols through the heathen  
     world.'

And again :

' Embryoes and idiots, eremits and friars,  
 White, black, and gray, with all their  
     trumpery.

Here pilgrims roam, that strayed so far to  
seek

In Golgotha Him dead, who lives in heav'n;  
And they who to be sure of paradise  
Dying put on the weeds of Dominic,  
Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised;  
They pass the planets seven, and pass the  
fixed,

And that crystalline sphere whose balance  
weighs

The trepidation talked, and that first moved:  
And now Saint Peter at heav'n's wicket seems  
To wait them with his keys, and now at foot  
Of heav'n's ascent they lift their feet, when,  
lo!

A violent cross-wind from either coast  
Blows them transverse ten thousand leagues  
awry

Into the devious air: then might ye see  
Cows, hoods, and habits with their wearers  
tost

And fluttered into rags; then reliques,  
beads,

Indulgences, dispenses, pardons, bulls,

The sport of winds: all these upwhirl'd  
aloft

Fly o'er the back side of the world far off,  
Into a limbo large and broad, since call'd  
The Paradise of fools, to few unknown.'

But Milton's teaching was not merely negative—his was a definite and constructive message. To Milton worship was submission to the will of God, and the serving of Him in the concerns of every-day life. It meant humility and effort.

'What better can we do than . . . .  
. . . . . prostrate fall  
Before Him reverent, and there confess  
Humbly our faults and pardon beg with  
tears?'

Nor does he rest here.

**Worship** True repentance must pro-  
**involves**  
**Independence.** duce godly effort and a new  
life; and so our great re-  
ligious poet, in delivering his message,  
emphasizes three aspects of character which  
seem to him to be of primary importance—

Independence, Temperance, Nobility. We shall presently find that each of these attributes is taken up and made the special theme of the three later poets, Burns, Wordsworth, and Tennyson.

The independence of Milton appeals to us when we think of him as one through whose blood coursed a burning desire for 'public liberty,' albeit in a day when that was considered a thought inconsistent with a well-ordered mind. He dared, both in public and private, to claim an independence from any 'unholy bondage.' He was manfully alive to his responsibilities and anxious to meet them—

'To serve then with our Maker  
Till Truth and Right from violence be freed,  
And Public Faith be cleared  
From the shameful hand of Public Fraud.'

It is not at all strange, when we realize this, that the high-minded Wordsworth, when oppressed by the want of courage and independent thought and action in his day, should have broken forth into passionate strains :



'Milton! thou shouldest be living at this hour.  
England hath need of thee.

We are selfish men.

Oh! raise us up, return to us again,  
And give us Manners, Virtue, Freedom,  
Power.

Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the  
sea!

Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way  
In cheerful godliness, and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on itself did lay.'

We can scarcely imagine  
     **Worship**      what the result would have  
     **involves**  
**Temperance.**    been had not Milton stood  
                      where he did on behalf of  
 Truth and Purity, and protested against  
 the debasing tendencies of his day—those  
 tendencies which, even in their limited and  
 chastened form, were able to produce the  
 profligate courtiers and playwrights of the  
 Restoration era.

Temperance, especially in the case of wine, was evidently a strong characteristic of this poet. He lived in times, it is true, when the highest ideal was a stern repression of the natural tendencies; but it were ungenerous to attribute this choice of abstinence, rather than indulgence, to anything but the highest motives. His aversion to strong drink is most clearly set forth in 'Samson Agonistes':

' I drank from the clear milky juice allaying  
Thirst, and refresh'd: nor envied them the  
grape,  
Whose heads that turbulent liquor fills with  
fumes.  
O madness to think use of strongest wines  
And strongest drinks our chief support of  
health,  
When God, with these forbidden, made choice  
to rear  
His mighty Champion, strong above compare,  
Whose drink was only from the liquid brook.'

It was not, however, in this direction alone that Milton evidenced his self-restraint. A

great writer has spoken of his disposition as—

‘A deep, habitual, and lovable nature.’

He must be alluding to this disposition in himself when, in ‘Paradise Regained,’ he says :

‘When I was yet a child no childish play  
To me was pleasing, all my mind was set  
Serious to learn and know and thence to do  
What might be public good.’

This is a spirit not far removed from the ‘Pietas’ of Virgil and other Latin writers.

So averse was Milton to frivolities that at Cambridge he was accorded the nickname of ‘The Lady.’ At the age of twenty-three he expresses his own sentiments :

‘All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Taskmaster’s eye.’

<b>Worship involves Nobility.</b>	His, too, was a high standard of honour. What an insight into his feelings he gives us in the mag-
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nificent peroration at the end of the fifth book!—

‘ So spake the Seraph Abdiel, faithful found  
Among the faithless, faithful only he;  
Among innumerable false, unmoved,  
Unshaken, uneduc’d, unterrifi’d,  
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;  
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought  
To swerve from truth, or change his constant  
mind  
Though single. From amidst them forth he  
passed,  
Long way through hostile scorn, which he  
sustain’d  
Superior, nor of violence fear’d aught;  
And, with retorted scorn, his back he turn’d  
On those proud towers to swift destruction  
doom’d.’

Milton does not shine so brightly, either as scholar, poet, cultured man, or patriot, as he does when he lets us see something of that wonderful sense of right and duty which possesses him. Perhaps we shall recognise

this best in the sentiments to which he gives vent in his description of the lady in 'Comus':

'Hence with thy brew'd enchantments, foul  
deceiver!

Hast thou betray'd my credulous innocence  
With visor'd falsehood and base forgery?  
And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here  
With liquorish baits, fit to ensnare a brute?  
Were it a draught for Juno when she ban-  
quets,

I would not taste thy treasonous offer; none  
But such as are good men can give good  
things;

And that which is not good is not delicious  
To a well-govern'd and wise appetite.'

Although, in respect to the conception of Deity, progress in moral and religious thought might seem to have been once more arrested, a closer examination of the writings of Milton will show that the thoughts of 'Futurity' were really taking a greater hold upon the minds of the day in which he lived.

The whole idea of 'Paradise Regained' is the conception of a larger and hitherto unappreciated hope for the future.

In 'Samson Agonistes' the hero says :

' All these indignities, for such they are,  
From thine, these evils I deserve and more,  
Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me  
Justly, yet despair not of His final pardon  
Whose ear is ever open, and His eye  
Gracious to readmit the suppliant.'

The whole subject of 'Paradise Regained' is dominated by the picture which Milton draws of our 'first parents,' penitent and confident of pardon and restoration :

' Undoubtedly He will relent and turn  
From His displeasure, in whose look, serene  
When angry most He seemed and most severe,  
What else but Favour, Grace, and Mercy  
shone?'

The thought of Futurity is seen in Milton

only very gradually to have taken a strong hold upon his mind, and in so saying we must notice the important distinction between the assent to a doctrine contained in the accepted religious dogmas of the body, to which an individual belongs, and the truth which has become part of a man's very being from sheer conviction. Thus, while as a Christian and a Churchman, Milton was professedly a believer in the Future Life, we cannot but observe that in his writings (expressing, as has been said, the best thoughts of his day), so far from the definite statements that might have been expected from one with his environment and education, in

point of fact we find, on this  
**His Limita-** important point — a future  
**tions.** life, little more than one

slight step forward from the position of the previous century. This doctrine of a Future Life, though always accepted as part of the Christian creed, has really had very little hold on the intellect of the world, but has been laboriously working its way to the

surface, and is only now beginning to be recognised as rational and true.

Whilst Shakespeare dimly, if at all, suggests the thought of a future life, Milton does not go so very much further—apart, at least, from his conventional and material description of heaven and hell. He has much to say of spirits, but of *man's* real purpose little. He gives us, however, just a hint of developing thought in this direction when he says:

‘Though what if earth  
Be but the shadow of heaven, and things  
therein  
Each to other like more than on earth is  
thought?’

But the real spirit of the poet's inner mind is seen in the vague hope which, poet-like, gets beyond the hope stage:

‘Yet one doubt  
Pursues me still, least all I cannot die;  
Least that pure breath of life, the spirit of  
man



Which God inspired, cannot together perish  
With this corporeal clod.'

These words alone would suffice to mark a definite progress of ideals in the Miltonic era.

The succeeding century saw  
The no rapid change of thought;  
Outcome it was occupied in consoli-  
of it all. dating into the national con-

stitution the developments of thought that had already taken place. It was the period in which the attempt was made to convert doctrines into practice, and undoubtedly great efforts were made to remedy the pestilential state of the moral atmosphere. From the works of Dryden, Addison, and Pope, it will, however, be seen that little, if any, progress was made in the direction of thought during that period. The moral and religious worlds were slowly settling down to a semi-puritanical conception of right living. From the cruel Tyrant of the Italian worship the pendulum of the idea of God was swinging towards the despotic Judge of Calvinistic theology, while,

with regard to the Future of humanity, the  
well-known and curious lines  
**Reactions.** of Dryden show the spirit of  
his day and the development  
of the Miltonic wanderings :

‘ For when we’re dead and our freed souls  
enlarged,  
Of nature’s grosser burden we’re discharged ;  
Then gentle as a happy lover’s sigh,  
Like wandering meteors through the air will  
fly,  
And in our airy walk as subtle guests  
We’ll steal into our cruel fathers’ breasts ;  
There read their souls and track each  
passion’s sphere.’

Addison dealt almost exclusively with the  
defects of the present, and sought to assist  
the work of moral progress, as is asserted by  
his friend Tickell, who says of him :

‘ He taught us how to live, and, oh ! too high  
The price of knowledge, taught us how to  
die.’

## CHAPTER VI

### BURNS AND HIS MESSAGE

THE tendency to rest on the laurels of the past and the evils that always ensue from this tendency are well evidenced in the cold, worldly, though outwardly religious, atmosphere in which Pope writes. This state of affairs reached its zenith towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the great Ayrshire bard caught the spirit of universal desire for liberty and religious progress, and struck many a mortal blow against the ecclesiastical institutions of his day; and when, out of the anguish of his unfettered soul, he cries,

‘ Lord, hear my earnest cry and prayer  
Against the Presbytry of Ayr,’

our hearts are with him, for we know that at

least in Scotland the whole idea of religion had become so crystallized into the various rules of the Church, her courts and her government, that there remained little room for the exercise of practical Christianity.

It is not only outward Worship that fails. It is the false conception of the character of God as generally accepted that lies behind many of the evils that he criticises. Newer and nobler thoughts of the Divine Father were forcing themselves to the front. Sooner or later the old and effete Calvinism must die. With characteristic courage and a remarkable sense of the due proportion of justice which man intuitively postulates in the Divine economy, he does not hesitate to uncover the lower view and display  
God. all its hideousness. What could have struck a more deadly blow at the preaching current in his day than the first stanza of 'Holy Willie's Prayer'—

'O Wha that in the heav'ns dost dwell,  
Wha as it pleases best Thysel',

Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,  
A' for Thy glory,  
And no for ony guid or ill  
They've done afore Thee!  
I bless and praise Thy matchless might.'

**Yet God is to him no mere phantom; whilst  
God is the 'All-good' man must not forget to  
honour Him:**

'The great Creator to reverse  
Must sure become the creature ;  
But still the preaching cant forbear,  
And e'en the rigid feature :  
Yet ne'er with wits profane to range,  
Be complaisance extended.  
An Atheist's laugh's a poor exchange  
For Deity offended !

‘ When ranting round in pleasure’s ring,  
Religion may be blinded ;  
Or, if she gi’e a random sting  
It may be little minded ;  
But when on life we’re tempest driv’n,  
A conscience but a canker,

A correspondence fixed wi' Heaven,  
Is sure a noble anchor !'

To Burns, heaven is the abode of material happiness, where the injustices of this life will be reversed, and a penitent heart is all that is needed to secure this. His view of God as the 'All-good' will account  
Heaven. for the cheerful geniality which permeates nearly all his writings on the subject of death. Even when the picture presents itself of the haughty lordling making his poor brother mourn, his confidence does not flag ; he says :

' Yet let not this too much, my son,  
Disturb thy youthful breast :  
This partial view of human kind  
Is surely not the best.  
The poor, oppressed, honest man,  
Had never sure been born,  
Had there not been some recompense  
To comfort those that mourn.  
O Death, the poor man's dearest friend,  
The kindest and the best !'

The idea of worship as  
**Worship.** illustrated in the writings of  
 Robert Burns is peculiarly  
 interesting. 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'  
 well describes the difference between the  
 conventional worship of his time and the  
 true devotion of heart that was, perhaps,  
 most frequently to be found in the humble  
 cottage :

✓  
 ' Then kneeling down to Heaven's Eternal  
     King,  
     The saint, the father, and the husband  
         prays.  
 Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing,  
     That thus they all shall meet in future  
         days ;  
 There ever bask in uncreated rays,  
     No more to sigh or shed the bitter  
         tear,  
 Together hymning their Creator's praise  
     In such society, yet still more dear ;  
 While circling time moves round in an eternal  
     sphere.

' Compared with this, how poor Religion's  
pride

In all the pomp of method and of art,  
When men display to congregations wide  
Devotion's every grace except the heart !  
The Power, incensed, the pageant will desert,  
The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole ;  
But haply, in some cottage far apart,  
May hear, well pleased, the language of  
the soul ;  
And in His Book of Life the inmates poor  
enrol.'

This honest, homely wor-  
ship of the poor Cotter is to  
him more beautiful than all  
the costly performances in magnificent fanes.  
He is careful, however, over and over again,  
to show that to his mind, true worship means  
true work, evidenced in generous goodwill.  
To this poet, the best type of robust Chris-  
tianity is—

' The social, friendly, honest man,  
Whate'er he be,'



for

‘ ‘Tis he fulfils great Nature’s plan,  
An’ none but he.’

Burns rises, however, to his highest when he advises his readers to emulate the life of independent and untrammelled nobility :

‘ Let no mean hope your souls enslave,  
Be independent, generous, brave.  
Your poet such example gave,  
And such rever.’

**Marked Progress.** Much has been said to disparage the writings of this Scotch bard, but two ideas will ever claim for him a high standard of poetic worth. He emphasizes boldly and clearly a higher and better, though still material, conception of heaven, as expressly stated in the passage just quoted ; and in his writings there comes upon the scene for the first time a newer and grander appreciation of the Divine Ruler, that cannot have failed to influence in its reflected force the minds

of the mass of his readers. God to Robert Burns is no more the Despot.

‘ Who made the heart, ’tis He alone  
Decidedly can try us.  
He knows each chord—its various tone,  
Each spring—its various bias :  
‘ Then at the balance let’s be mute,  
We never can adjust it ;  
What’s done we partly may compute,  
But know not what’s resisted.’

And again, in the prospect of death, this greater and truer ideal comes out still more forcibly :

‘ Where human weakness has come short,  
Or frailty stept aside,  
Do Thou, All Good ! for such Thou art,  
In shades of darkness hide.  
Where with intention I have err’d,  
No other plea I have,  
But Thou art good, and goodness still  
Delighteth to forgive.’

## CHAPTER VII

### WORDSWORTH AND HIS MESSAGE

BUT even the torch which Robert Burns, and possibly Logan, too, lighted, would hardly have availed to stir the slumbers of the eighteenth century had not two other circumstances—the convulsive events of the French Revolution and the rise of the ‘Lake’ school of poets—added their forces towards remedying the evils of such an artificial age.

**The  
Eighteenth  
Century.**

In architecture, dress, and literature the same stereotyped ideals were everywhere apparent; nothing natural was allowed to appear; even the trees might not grow as they would, but must be cut into fantastic shapes. Religion and life were brought under the same domination. The

best intellects, however, could not long remain pent up within such narrow walls, and in the domain of artistic expression found vent for their feelings by the identification of God with nature. They found joy in devotion to the true, the beautiful, the good, either in hill or mountain, in dale or valley, by the running brook or the flowering hedgerow. We find this expansion of the God-idea making itself evident in the writings of Wordsworth amidst the censure and opposition of not a few so-called religious persons of his day, who, being nothing if not conventional, were of necessity not amongst the foremost minds of that period—men who classed wild-flowers as ‘weeds,’ and forbore to speak of earthly love on the Sabbath.

To Wordsworth the whole  
‘The Dawn’ of creation brings him ‘au-  
still Higher thentic tidings of invisible  
Ideals. things,’ and certainly nature  
taught him more of the character of true  
worship than was known to many who have  
followed him.

What grander conception  
**Worship.** could we have of the due  
 worship of a pure soul than  
 this?—

‘ Dear child, dear child, thou walkest with me  
 here ;

If thou appear untouched by solemn thoughts,  
 Thy nature is not therefore less Divine.

Thou liest in Abraham’s bosom all the year ;  
 And worship’st at the Temple’s inner shrine,  
 God being with thee, when we know it not.’

Truly Wordsworth, if he does no more, at  
 least brings us up to the religious ideal of the  
 average person to-day, for who is there that is  
 worth the name of Man that does not love the  
 beautiful and natural, or fails to see and hear  
 in them the voice of God? As Wordsworth  
 says :

‘ One impulse from a vernal wood  
 May teach you more of man,  
 Of moral evil and of good,  
 Than all the sages can.’

By his love of nature Wordsworth wrought the cure for the moral diseases of his day, and by giving to us the best thoughts of the best men of his time, he has not only brought us into closer touch with nature, but has pointed us to God and Good, through nature. He has made God more real to us, and, as a sequel to his work, already many are beginning to realize how infinitely fragile is the wall between science and the best religious thought, between the truest poetry and the truest faith. He interprets to us God, life, and ourselves. He satisfies us, though no doubt he will not satisfy the generation that is to be. He felt that man needs

‘ A pleasure quiet and profound,  
Of permanent and universal sway,  
And permanent belief.’

His finger points to the interlacing and interpenetrating influence of the great Over-soul of the universe in all earthly events. He says :

'Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought,  
 And givest form to images, a breath  
 And everlasting motion, not in vain  
 By day or starlight thus from my first dawn  
 Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me  
 The passions which build up a human soul.'

Of course, Wordsworth has been accused of Pantheism, but that is the fate of every thinker, since the mental vision of his accusers is generally of too limited a character to differentiate.

But while we may see a very distinct growth of ideal with reference to the conception of God in the writings of Wordsworth, the profoundest if not the strangest of all his doctrines, and one which not only develops the idea, but even takes for granted a future life, is his doctrine of 'reminiscence.' His teaching approximates closely to the Platonic doctrine of re-incarnation.

**The Past  
 and Future  
 Life.**

Owing to his poetic vagueness, some have failed to recognise any such idea in the teaching of Wordsworth,

but we ought not to overlook the fact that the religious bigotry of his time made it difficult—as, indeed, it still is—to speak quite plainly on such a subject. This caused him so to veil his terms, that it is only in the present we are beginning to understand their true meaning. The poet-philosopher could not allow the great problem of the past and future to be slurred over, but felt that it must be grappled with and understood.

He taught that

‘The child is father to the man,’

and that therefore, from the recollections and observations of early childhood, we may do something to trace our ancestry. It is to the workings of the mind of the child that the poet appeals when he wishes to prove that knowledge is recollection, and that our recognition of ‘geometrical truths,’ as Matthew Arnold calls the conceptions of early childhood (those truths that come so promptly as to appear instinctive), depends on our having been actually familiar with them in an earlier



world. Wordsworth invokes the memory of a state in which he had known no sin :

‘ Happy those days when I  
 Shined in my angel infancy,  
 Before I understood the place  
 Appointed for my second race,  
 Or taught my soul to fancy aught  
 But a white celestial thought ;  
 Before I taught my tongue to wound  
 My conscience with a sinful sound,  
 But felt through all this fleshly dress  
 Bright shoots of everlastingness.’

But Wordsworth is not content with merely analyzing his childhood's experiences and impressions ; he implies and even asserts that these ‘fancies from afar are brought,’ and that the child's view of the world reveals to him truths which full-grown man with difficulty retains or recovers.

Thus, Wordsworth followed  
**A Platonist.** Plato in believing that the  
 child's soul had existed before  
 it entered the body. The child begins by

feeling the natural world strange to him, but he sees in it, as it were, what he has been accustomed to see.

He discerns in it kinship with the spiritual world which he dimly remembers—that ‘unsubstantial fairy place,’ the sense of which, though it never entirely vanishes, with advancing years we find less and less present with us.

Listen to the poet’s own words on the subject in that grand, hopeful, soul-sustaining ode on ‘Intimations of Immortality,’ which makes us feel our angel ancestry :

‘ There was a time when meadow, grove, and  
 stream,  
 The earth and every common sight,  
 To me did seem  
 Apparell’d in celestial light,  
 The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
 It is not now as it hath been of yore :—  
 Turn wheresoe’er I may,  
 By night or day,  
 The things which I have seen I now can see  
 no more !

\* \* \* \* \*

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :

The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar :

Not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, who is our home :

Heaven lies about us in our infancy !

Shades of the prison-house begin to close

Upon the growing boy,

But he beholds the light and whence it  
flows,

He sees it in his joy :

\* \* \* \* \*

The homely nurse doth all she can

To make her foster-child, her inmate man,

Forget the glories he hath known,

And that imperial palace whence he came.

\* \* \* \* \*

The thought of our past years in me doth  
breed

Perpetual benediction : not indeed

For that which is most worthy to be bless'd ;

Delight and liberty, the simple creed  
Of childhood, whether busy or at rest,  
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his  
breast :

Not for these I raise  
The song of thanks and praise ;  
But for those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings ;

Blank misgivings of a creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized,  
High instincts before which our mortal  
nature

Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised !

But for those first affections,  
Those shadowy recollections,

Which, be they what they may,  
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,  
Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;  
Uphold us—cherish—and have power to  
make

Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal silence : truths that wake,  
To perish never ;

\* \* \* \*

Though nothing can bring back  
     the hour  
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the  
     flower ;  
 We will grieve not, rather find  
 Strength in what remains behind,  
 In the primal sympathy  
 Which having been, must ever be ;  
 In the soothing thoughts that spring  
     Out of human suffering,  
 In the faith that looks through death,  
 In years that bring the philosophic  
     mind.'

Thank God that ever poet taught such  
 grand thoughts of *God* and *Life* and *Self*.

He has spoken words  
 which are inspired—if ever  
 words were—words worthy  
 of this century. He has  
 shown us that, though it is true that all are  
 born with a propensity to sin, it is equally  
 true that each physical human life is re-  
 sponsible for its own being, and must stand

**Human**  
**Responsibility**  
**Limited.**

at its own intrinsic value, apart altogether from the moral or immoral acts of its parents.

Viewed thus, each human soul has its own possibilities; it brings with it its own consciousness, which, happily for many, is a consciousness of 'coming from afar'; and even, if in the midst of life, we find many of our early illusions and dreams have 'faded into the light of common day,' yet it is 'from glory to glory,' and later life reveals to us other and sublimer dreams of a more eternal value, and the sunset is oftentimes rich with a splendour more brilliant than the trailing clouds of sunrise. 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy,' 'for of such is the kingdom of heaven,' and that death could bring annihilation of the life which is at the heart of all things, was to the poet an unthinkable anomaly.

We have tried to trace what might be called the 'Evolution of the idea of God,' Worship and the Future Life in poetry from the time of Chaucer up to the level of the ordinary

conception of the present day, but to fulfil the conditions of our postulate we ought naturally to look for the poet-prophet of our own day—that is to say, the one who sums up in his writings not only the average, but the finest and noblest ideals of the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TENNYSON AND HIS MESSAGE

**The  
Scientific  
Spirit of  
his Day.**

TENNYSON lived in a day when the old and well-worn ideas, which from the time of the Reformation had in one form or another satisfied the popular mind, were beginning to suffer from the influence of the disintegrating scientific spirit that was beginning to make itself felt. 'This is a terrible age of unfaith,' he would say; 'I cannot endure that men should sacrifice everything at the cold altar of what, with their imperfect knowledge, they choose to call Truth and Reason.' Yet he himself was not free from its influences. As might have been expected from a great poet with sensitive nature and keen spiritual apprehension, he felt the influence of the new teaching as early as anyone. His orthodoxy shows signs of having experienced a distinct influence



upon it when he says that 'different language does not always imply different opinions'; or, again: 'It is impossible to imagine that the Almighty will ask you when you come before Him in the next life what your particular form of creed was; but the question will rather be, Have you been true to yourself and given in My name a cup of cold water to one of these little ones?'

**The  
Product  
of his  
Times.**

Tennyson was, indeed, typical of his own day's thought. He expresses unconsciously the curious blending of faith and doubt which will always mark the theology of the second half of the nineteenth century. He recognises that the almost blind idolatry of book ordinances and shibboleths, which had held sway in his childhood, must give way before a more enlightened and more human view of life; yet the prospect of the uprooting of the very foundations of things made him recoil and seek for safety in an attitude of hesitation, an unwillingness to yield up any of the

ideas of the past: this he called 'Reverence.' In spite of this, however, at times he reaches what for him is a very dangerous and giddy height. When, for instance, he would sympathize with those who seemed

'To have reached a purer air,  
Whose faith has centre everywhere  
Nor cares to fix itself to form.'

But true to the unstable conditions of his day, and in real sympathy with the changing viewpoint of his generation, and almost against his own wishes, he marks the transition between the past and the present by his evident mental struggles and the 'faith diversified with doubt,' which makes his religious conceptions so perplexing to the ordinary reader.

He expresses his true feelings when he sings :  
**His Doubts.**

'Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out.  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.'

Then he looks out into the future, and, poet-like, recognises the apparent chaos of change. He cannot see that it is a necessary prelude to harmony; but how could he? He foresaw, indeed, the days from which the thinking world is only now beginning to emerge, and the vision was that of the turmoil and apparent loss of religion, which the greatest minds of his day recognised to be the future towards which the tendency of the religious ideas of their time was leading; and therefore, though at times he felt the necessity of living for himself on the highest plane, he at last falls back in despair on that character and spirit to which I have alluded—that which he calls ‘reverence’—in the belief that it is the only spirit that can save from utter loss.

If possible, he falls back  
**His Despair.** too far in the direction of  
 caution. Still, in all that he  
 says he carries us with him, for even in our  
 own day we have not yet got quite accustomed  
 to the new views, and at times we do come  
 across those who are as yet unfitted to receive

them and to whom they might be even harmful. He is right when he says:

‘ Leave thou thy sister when she prays,  
Her early Heaven, her happy views ;  
Nor thou with shadowed hint confuse  
A life that leads melodious days.

‘ Her faith through form is pure as thine,  
Her hands are quicker unto good :  
Oh sacred be the flesh and blood  
To which she links a truth divine !’

Or again :

‘ Hold thou the good : define it well :  
For fear “ Divine Philosophy ”  
Should push beyond her mark, and be  
Procuress to the Lords of Hell.’

But struggle as he will with the problems of life, he never gets beyond the really remarkable passage that expresses, better than anything else could do, his attitude towards the idea of the true relationship of the Christian soul to its Creator :

' Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
 But more of Reverence in us dwell,  
 That mind and soul according well  
 May make one music as before—but vaster.'

We have, in the next place,  
 God. to ask, How did the author of  
 so many noble poems regard  
 God? Those who had gone before him had,  
 indeed, taught men to worship a great and  
 powerful being, the ' All-good ' and the ' Great  
 Oversoul,' but these were far-off ideas, high-  
 sounding and respectful, but conveying little  
 meaning in those days.

As we might expect, the work committed  
 to Tennyson was to bring God nearer to our  
 hearts.

His son, the present Lord Tennyson, has  
 told us much of his father's ideas on this  
 all-important subject.

' He dreaded the dogmatism of sects and  
 rash definitions of God. "I dare hardly name  
 His name," he would say; and, accordingly,  
 he named Him in the " Ancient Sage " " The

Nameless." "But take away belief in the conscious personality of God," he said, "and you take away the backbone of the world."

"On God and God-like men we build our trust." A week before his death I was sitting by him, and he talked long of the personality and of the love of God—"that God whose eyes consider the poor," "who catereth even for the sparrow."

"I should," he said, "infinitely rather feel myself the most miserable wretch on the face of the earth with a God above than the highest type of man standing alone." He would allow that God is unknowable in "His whole world-self and all-in-all," and that therefore there was some force in the objection made by some people to the word "personality," as being "anthropomorphic," and that perhaps "self-consciousness" or "mind" might be clearer to them; but at the same time he insisted that, although "man is like a thing of nought" in "the boundless plan," our highest view of God must be more or less anthropomorphic, and therefore it is that he

prefers to express the attributes of the Divine by the imagery of a Good Father—

‘That God which ever lives and loves.’

‘If e’er, where faith had fallen asleep,  
I heard a voice, “Believe no more,”  
And heard an ever-breaking shore  
That tumbled in the Godless deep ;

‘A warmth *within* the breast would melt  
The freezing reason’s colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answered, “I HAVE FELT.”

‘No, like a child in doubt and fear :  
But that blind clamour made me wise ;  
Then was I as a child that cries,  
But, crying, KNOWS HIS FATHER NEAR.’

Beautifully and pathetically does he teach us that while God is Omnipotent and Omnipresent He is also All-loving; no far-off abstraction, but One who stands in some personal relationship to us. We feel the power of the thought when he says :

'Hallowed be Thy name   Hallelujah!  
Infinite Ideality!  
Immeasurable Reality!  
Infinite Personality!  
Hallowed be Thy name.   Hallelujah!

'We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and  
in Thee;  
We feel we are something—*that* also has  
come from Thee;  
We know we are nothing—but Thou wilt help  
us to be.  
Hallowed be Thy name.   Hallelujah!'

Or again :

'Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit  
with Spirit can meet,  
Closer He is than breathing and nearer  
than hands and feet.'

Thus does this poet bring God very near to us.  
When, however, we turn to the vitally  
important subject of the future life, the pro-  
gress of thought is less marked. He puts in



a more powerful way than any former poet  
the purpose of God in creating man :

‘For in the world, which is not ours, They  
said,

“Let Us make man,” and that which should  
be man,

From that one light no man can look upon,  
Drew to this shore, lit by the suns and  
moons

And all the shadows. O dear Spirit, half  
lost

In thine own shadow and this fleshly sign  
That thou art thou—who wailest being born  
And banished into mystery, and the pain  
Of this divisible undivisible world . . .’

‘He was occasionally much troubled,’ writes  
his son, ‘with the intellectual problem of the  
apparent profusion and waste of life, and by  
the vast amount of sin and suffering through-  
out the world, for these seemed to militate  
against the idea of the Omnipotent and All-  
loving Father.

‘No doubt in such moments he might possibly have been heard to say what I myself have heard him say: “An Omnipotent Creator who could make such a painful world is to me *sometimes* as hard to believe in as to believe in blind matter behind everything. . . . I can almost understand some of the gnostic heresies, which only, after all, put the difficulty one step further back :

“O me, for why is all around us here  
As if some lesser god had made the world;  
But had not force to shape it as he would,  
Till the High God behold it from beyond,  
And enter it, and make it beautiful?” ’

After one of these moods in the summer of 1892, he exclaimed: ‘Yet God *is* love, transcendent, all-pervading! We do not get *this* faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature *alone*, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells that God is disease, murder, and rapine. We get this faith from God alone.’

'Only That which made us, meant us to be  
 mightier by-and-by,  
 Set the sphere of all the boundless heavens  
 within the human eye,  
 Sent the shadow of Himself, the boundless,  
 through the human soul;  
 Boundless inward, in the atom; boundless  
 outward, in the whole.'

Yet these ideas were not so new as might  
 appear, for Wordsworth had already shown  
 that the doctrine of Evolution was far from  
 being unknown. Tennyson's, however, is not  
 a scientific faith. He feels what he says, and  
 so believes it. How profound was his belief  
 in the future life we are told  
**A Future Life.** by his son, but from his  
 writings one rather gathers  
 that, however much he believed it for himself,  
 he did not dare to be dogmatic on the subject  
 in his works. He cannot believe that God  
 has made all for naught, and so he sees,  
 in the universal instinct and yearning for  
 another life, presumptive evidence of a future  
 existence:

'My own dim life should teach me this,  
That life shall live for evermore,  
Else earth is darkness at the core,  
And dust and ashes all that is.

\* \* \* \* \*

'What, then, were God to such as I?  
'Twere hardly worth my while to choose  
Of things all mortal, or to use  
A little patience ere I die;

'Twere best at once to sink to peace,  
Like birds the charming serpent draws,  
To drop head-foremost in the jaws  
Of vacant darkness and to cease.'

Perhaps the progressive idea is better  
brought out in the following :

'The wages of sin is death : if the wages of  
Virtue be dust,  
Would she have heart to endure for the  
life of the worm and the fly?  
She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet  
seats of the just,

To rest in a golden grove, or to bask in a  
summer sky :

Give her the wages of going on, and not  
to die.'

Probably he rises to his highest when he makes his confession of faith on this all-important subject. There is, of course, the ever-present dread of definiteness which marks his character, but we must remember that in those days to have been dogmatic on some of the questions that we hold dear would have meant opposition of the most bitter kind. He expresses a distinct advance on the past when he gives vent to the universalism of our own day in the following :

' Oh, yet we trust that somehow good

Will be the final goal of ill,

To pangs of nature, sins of will,

Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;

' That nothing walks with aimless feet ;

That not one life shall be destroy'd,

Or cast as rubbish to the void,

When God hath made the pile complete ;

‘That not a worm is cloven in vain ;  
That not a moth with vain desire  
Is shrivell’d in a fruitless fire,  
Or but subserves another’s gain.

‘Behold, we know not anything ;  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last—far off—at last, to all,  
And every winter change to spring.

‘So runs my dream : but what am I ?  
An infant crying in the night :  
An infant crying for the light :  
And with no language but a cry.’

Heaven is, however, at  
Heaven. times to him extremely an-  
thropomorphic. It is not,  
however, the resting from all effort or the  
singing and golden harps that constitutes  
the heaven of some people to-day ; it means  
progress :

‘ And, doubtless, unto thee is given  
 A life that bears immortal fruit  
 In those great offices that suit  
 The full-grown energies of heaven.’

And again :

‘ How fares it with the happy dead ?  
 For here the man is more and more ;  
 But he forgets the days before  
 God shut the doorways of his head.

‘ The days have vanish’d, tone and tint,  
 And yet, perhaps, the hoarding sense  
 Gives out at times (he knows not whence)  
 A little flash, a mystic hint ;

‘ And in the long harmonious years  
 (If Death so taste Lethean springs)  
 May some dim touch of earthly things  
 Surprise thee ranging with thy peers.

‘ If such a dreamy touch should fall,  
 O turn thee round, resolve the doubt ;  
 My guardian angel will speak out  
 In that high place, and tell thee all.’

He is, nevertheless, obliged to fall back on a very realistic and material description in the attempt to define our relationship with those we have known while on earth ; but, none the less, the passage is exquisite :

‘ That each, who seems a separate whole,  
Should move his rounds, and fusing all  
The skirts of self again, should fall,  
Remerging in the general Soul,

‘ Is faith as vague as all unsweet :  
Eternal form shall still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside ;  
And I shall know him when we meet :

‘ And we shall sit at endless feast,  
Enjoying each the other’s good :  
What vaster dream can hit the mood  
Of love on earth ? He seeks at least

‘ Upon the last and sharpest height,  
Before the spirits fade away,  
Some landing-place, to clasp and say,  
“ Farewell ! We lose ourselves in light.” ’



## CHAPTER IX

### BROWNING AND HIS MESSAGE

We shall doubtless be expressing what will be an unwelcome sentiment when we refuse to recognise the late Poet Laureate as the noblest scion of poetic genius for our era. He must, however, be deliberately placed in a position anterior to Browning in reference to the expression of ideal moral and religious thought, in spite of that spirit of intense piety which so uniformly permeates his writings.

The volume published by **An Appreciation.** his son Hallam, as well as a valuable paper recently read before the Royal Society of Literature, are able attempts to place Tennyson in the forefront of the poetic field; but whilst we all delight to bask in the sunshine of his graceful diction, and though he was undoubtedly a man of very great powers, he will ever, to the mind of

many readers, occupy a position midway between Wordsworth and Browning. He portrays the best thought of the middle of the last century, and must, in regard to his writings, be considered only the very brilliant complement to the efforts of the 'Lake' school. We may well believe that when the great teachings which Tennyson has crystallized with such inimitable refinement of language and thought are described in the years to come as 'old-fashioned,' the works of Robert Browning will be counted as Sibylline books. They will rank as the guides, friends, and counsellors of the moral and religious teachers of the day, in spite of the fact, which cannot be denied, that in some instances, at least, his style seems to lack that standard of rhythmical cadence which an intuitive sense of proportion within us seems to demand.

Both these great men lie together in the Poets' Corner at Westminster.

Tennyson has had the larger appreciation of the past; Browning will live in the future,

since he is the flower of poetic thought and the genius of moral and religious conception. Tennyson was but the harbinger of a 'large hope'; he gave musical expression to the growing aspiration of pity and love. As far as can be ascertained from his writings, he believed vaguely in the ultimate victory of the Divine goodness, but he never saw evil being changed into good. He could not see the good of evil; he could only say:

‘O yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood.’

But Browning's psychology

**His**  
**Psychology.** was of a far deeper sort. His mind was far bolder and more resolutely speculative than that of the author of 'In Memoriam.' He was not afraid of sin; he searched it through and through. He thought it had a meaning, and that it was in itself a great educator.

In his 'Parleyings with Bernard de Mande-

ville,' Browning teaches us that we must concede a use to evil, because it is

'The scheme by which through ignorance  
Good labours to exist.'

                    We can only distinguish  
**Sin.**          knowledge of good by know-  
                    ledge of evil; good and evil  
grow together. What know we

'But proof were gained that every growth of  
good

Sprang consequent on evil's neighbourhood?'

'Night needs day, shine needs shade, so  
Good needs Evil,' says Browning in 'Parley-  
ings with Francis Furini.' Evil he believes  
to be finite, transitory, and essential to the  
attainment of all higher and permanent good;  
nor is there anything in the existence of  
moral evil to make us doubt Divine goodness:

                    'Fair and good are products  
Of foul and evil; one must bring to pass  
the other

Just as poisons grow drugs.'

We are, then, according to Browning, to consider evil as shade in relation to light, or, as he puts it in 'Abt Vogler'—

' Evil is null, is naught.'

But he does not stop here.

**Pain.** We must ever struggle with evil, for 'no battle, no victory.'

We must in this life have

' Pain with joy,

Folly with wisdom, all that works annoy

With all that quiets and contents';

and then, for our benefit, evil must always stay with us here :

' For mankind springs

Salvation by each hindrance interposed.'

' Why comes temptation but for man to meet  
And master, and make crouch beneath his  
foot,

And so be pedestalled in triumph?'

It is in the poem 'Easter Day' that the new light seems to burst upon him with all its

force, and that he sees the value of trial, temptation, and evil; the limitation of life becomes clear :

‘ And so I live, you see,  
Go through the world, try, prove, respect,  
Prefer still struggling to effect  
My warfare happy that I can  
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,  
Not left in God’s contempt apart  
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart.’

And this, too, is true of pain. In the hands of this teacher pain and suffering have cast around them a halo of beauty that seems to make all life beautiful.

Pain has been urged against the doctrine of an all-loving Creator, and yet any physiologist will tell us that without a nervous system capable of suffering pain no pleasure could be enjoyed. Again, pain is protection. If fire did not cause the pain of burning, we should handle hot coals with our fingers, and soon destroy them. Pain always lasts while

there is the possibility of cure. Pompilia says, in 'The Ring and the Book':

'The guardian angel discontinued pain  
Because the hope of cure was gone at last.'

All pain must be to work some good in the end. Again, in 'Ferishtah's Fancies' we read:

'Pain's shade enhanced the shine  
Of pleasure, else no pleasure.'

How precious does the thought become when understood!—

'Put pain from out the world, what room  
were left  
For thanks to God, for love to man?'

'Thanks to God  
And love to man—from man take these  
Away, and what is man worth?'

So it seems to us that  
God. Browning has given us a  
truer light on the Gospel  
message than any before him. He has explored the recesses of hell and found God

there also. He has staggered at nothing. He could go to the 'morgue,' and there, amidst the forlorn ruins of blasted and abortive lives, he could retain his optimism unshaken. He could declare boldly :

' My own hope is a sun will pierce  
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;  
That after last return the first,  
Though a wide compass round be fetched ;  
That what began best can't end worst,  
Nor what God blessed once prove  
accursed.'

Every element in our complex being has its value. Out of animal feelings, God, the great Alchemist, is for ever distilling sublime, imperishable human affections. And so our poet can sing the great hymn of confident affiance :

' I see the good of evil, why our world began  
at worst :  
Since Time means amelioration, tardily  
enough displayed,  
Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly  
retrograde.



We know more, though we know little ;  
 We grow stronger, though still weak ;  
 Partly see, though all too purblind ;  
 Stammer, though we cannot speak.'

But it may be asked, Were these thoughts, noble and true as they are, actuated by a Christian heart? Most certainly.

Surely Christmas Eve and Easter Day are meaningless if they do not express the author's belief in Christ and His atoning sacrifice.

Christ is no fable or myth  
 Christ. to Browning, for we hear him  
 praying for the 'Göttingen'  
 professor, who is a teacher of unbelief :

'May Christ do for him what no mere man  
 shall,  
 And stand confessed as the God of salva-  
 tion.'

In 'Pauline' he addresses our Lord in the most impassioned and devout terms :

'O Thou pale form !

\* \* \* \* \*

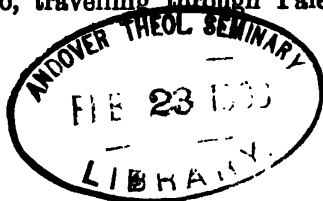
Oft have I stood by Thee ;  
Have I been keeping lonely watch with  
Thee

In the damp night by weeping Olivet ;  
Or leaning on Thy bosom, proudly less,  
Or dying with Thee on the lonely cross,  
Or witnessing Thine outburst from the tomb.'

In the exquisitely beautiful poem 'Christmas Eve' is a description of the midnight Mass at St. Peter's at Rome, in which Christ is represented as

'He who trod,  
Very man and very God,  
This earth in weakness, shame, and pain ;  
Dying the death . . . .  
Shall come again . . . .  
The one God, all in all,  
King of kings, Lord of lords.'

Again, in the powerful and remarkable poem 'An Epistle from Karshish' the Arab physician who, travelling through Palestine



soon after the death of our Lord, heard the story of Jesus, and how He raised Lazarus from the dead, and, writing to his old teacher, says :

‘The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think ?

So the All-Great were the All-Loving, too !’  
And Lazarus declares that Christ said to him :

‘And thou must love Me who have died for thee.’

Any possible doubt as to whether the message of Browning were a Christian one or no is set at rest when he declares that ‘the Love that tops the might’ is ‘Christ in God’ :

‘I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the earth, and out of it’;

whilst ‘Saul,’ probably the noblest of all his religious poems, seems little short of a Messianic oratorio in words.

What a magnificent prophetic outburst is

that in which he makes the sweet singer of Israel proclaim 'the Christ that is to be!'

'O Saul, it shall be  
A Face like my face that receives thee, a  
Man like to me;  
Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever, a  
Hand like this hand  
Shall throw open the gates of new life to  
thee;  
See the Christ stand!'

Browning probably was not what might be called a strictly orthodox Christian; he felt he knew too much to be bound by narrow and party limits; he basked in Truth, and Hope, and Love. He tells us: 'I believe in God, and Truth, and Love.' This is the dominant note of his work, and is clear from 'Pauline' right through to the last pages of 'Asolando.'

'In a beginning God made heaven and  
earth, . . . .  
From the first, Power was—I knew.  
Life has made clear to me,

That strive but for closer view,  
Love were as plain to see.'

But he is not merely a Theist. The Son of God made man for us solves for Browning all the hard problems of existence.

By Christ he came to know God; and knowing God as He only can be known, through the power of the God-man, he understood the infinite worth of the soul, the value of life, the certainty of a future state, and the mystery of evil, pain, sin, and death. In his teachings the Christian system is evident.

We now proceed to examine  
**Future Life.** what Browning has to tell us about the future of the soul, and in this respect he has encouraged more than hope within our hearts.

From 'Prospice' and the 'Epilogue to Asolando' he makes it quite evident that he did not fear death. In 'Saul' he speaks of 'death's minute of night' as introductory to 'life's day-spring.' The dying Paracelsus exclaims:

'If I stoop into a dark, tremendous sea of  
cloud,  
It is but for a time ; I press God's lamp  
Close to my breast ; its splendour soon or  
late,  
Will pierce the gloom. I shall emerge one  
day.'

Guido, in 'The Ring and the Book,' says :

'You never know what life means till you  
die :  
Even throughout life, 'tis death that makes  
life live,  
Gives it whatever the significance.'

And so, too, he believed in salvation from  
sin, even at the last moment of life. Count  
Guido, the poet and arch-villain, is addressed  
by the Pope in these words, which reflect the  
ideal of the thief on the cross :

'I stood at Naples once a night so dark  
I could have scarce conjectured there was  
earth  
Anywhere, sky, or sea, or world at all ;

But the night's black was burst through  
 by a blaze—  
 Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned,  
 and bore  
 Through her whole length of mountain  
 visible  
 There lay the city, thick and plain with  
 spires,  
 And like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea,  
 So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,  
 And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.'

In 'Easter Day' Browning gives us a vision  
 of judgment. A voice beside the beholder  
 says :

' Life is done.  
 Time ends, Eternity's begun,  
 And thou art judged for evermore.'

He regards the destiny of  
 Hell. the soul to be an eternal  
 progress. He believes in  
 just and varied future punishment. To him  
 hell is—

'That sad, obscure, sequestered state  
Where God unmakes but to remake the  
soul.'

Hell, then, is not eternal, for God cannot  
be absent from anywhere ; and

'In His face  
Is light, but in His shadow healing too.'

How Browning seems to  
**The Soul** be able to cast the whole  
**and its** problem of the future into  
**God.** God's lap! His faith, his  
reasonable faith, triumphs, and he can rest  
in God's hand.

Rabbi Ben Ezra says :

'Our times are in His hand  
Who saith, "A whole I planned."  
Youth shows but half ; trust God, see all ;  
Nor be afraid !'

'For God must be love.  
The loving worm within its clod  
Were diviner than a loveless God  
Amid His worlds, I will dare to say ?'



Tennyson has given us his 'Crossing the Bar.' Let us hear Browning's view in his own funeral sermon, 'The Epilogue to Asolando':

'Never dreamed, though right were worsted,  
     wrong would triumph,  
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight  
     better, sleep to wake.  
 No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-  
     time  
     Greet the unseen with a cheer!  
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either  
     should be,  
 "Strive and thrive!" Cry, "Speed," fight  
     on, fare ever  
 There as here!"'

- . Surely we cannot help feeling that there is something about Browning's writings, when carefully and thoughtfully perused, that seems to raise us up and stimulate us. He draws man and God closer to each other. He shows us God not merely in Nature, but in humanity. He brings home to us the con-

viction that in all life God's purpose for our individual good is immanent; and at the same time he paints man in the light in which God sees him—viz., as potential God. He inspires our conception of mankind as brave and strong and good, but, above all, rich in faith and knowledge. Browning gives us something to live by—ay, and to die by.

Surely we should all like to lie down for our last sleep in the spirit which is expressed in 'Prospice':

' One fight more,  
The best and the last !  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes,  
and forebore,  
And bade me creep past.  
No ! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my  
peers.  
The heroes of old,  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's  
arrears  
Of pain, darkness, and cold.

For sudden the worst turns the best to the  
brave,

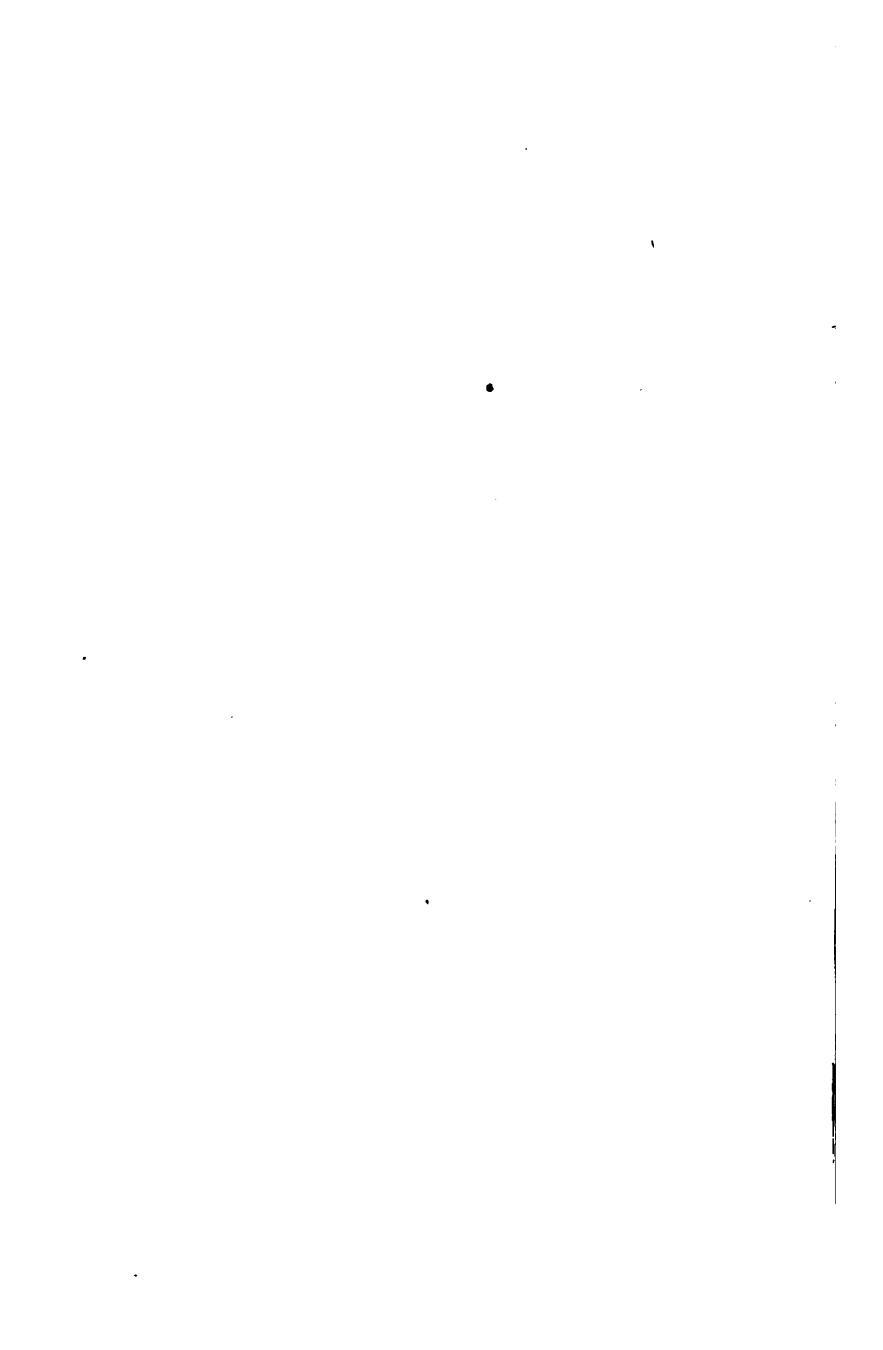
The black minute's at end,  
And the elements' rage, the fiend voices that  
rave,

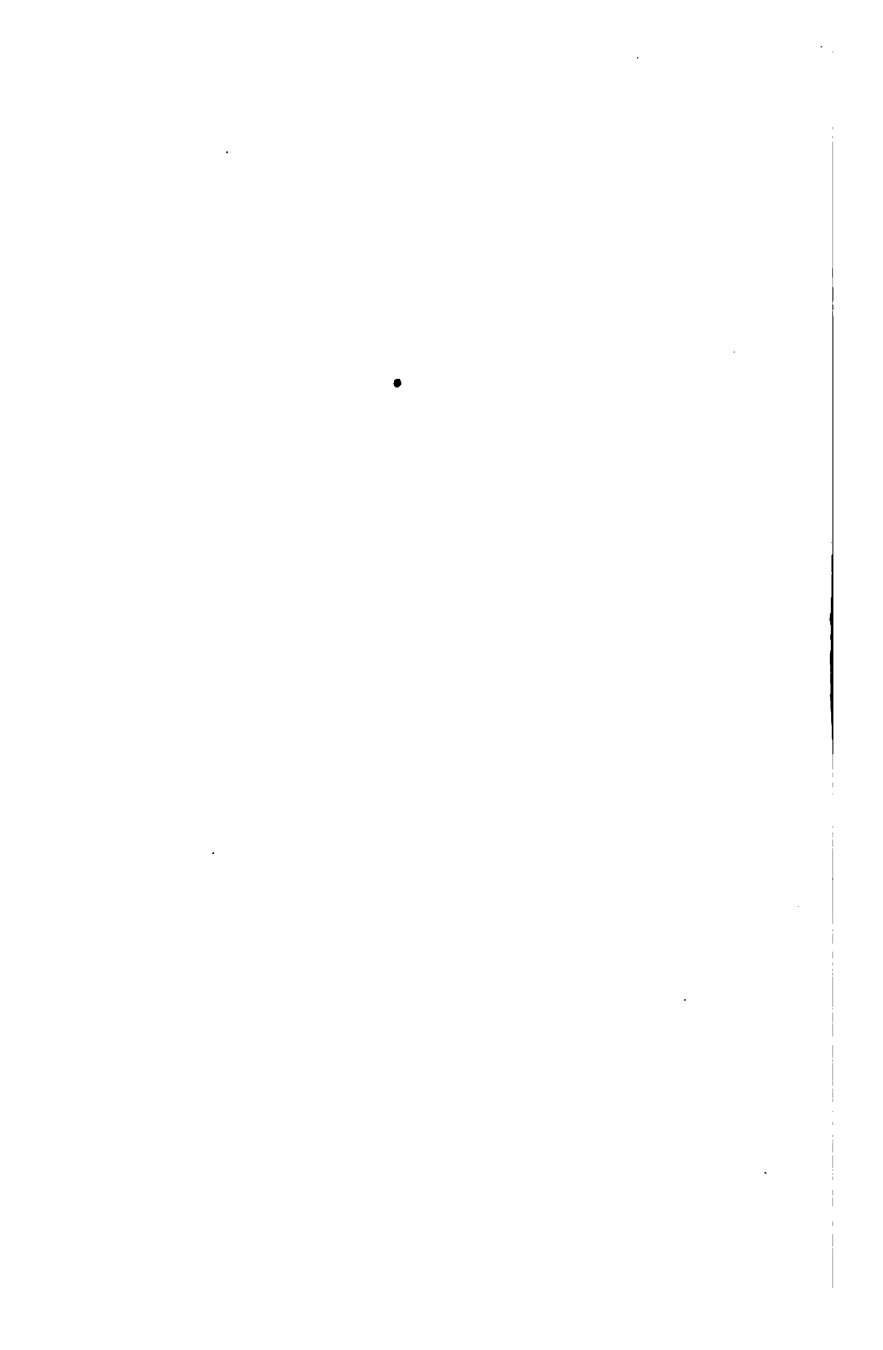
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of  
pain,

Then a light, then Thy breast,  
O thou Soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee  
again,

And with God be the rest!'

THE END







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